9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

the 17th century, the natives withdrew themselves to the mountains, where they lived a life that some historians have mistaken for aboriginal nomadism. 221

The booleying tradition, finally, throws light on many of the customs connected with cattle and sheep, and helps to explain the absence of the dairy in permanent dwellings which formerly had to serve as winter houses only, most of the dairy work being done in summer. It also helps us to attribute to custom rather than solely to laziness and neglect the Irish farmer's traditional indifference to the fate of his crops during the summer months. "Spring and harvest time," we quote a typical 19th century observer, "are the only periods at which the peasants exert themselves, and then they work very hard; for the rest of the year they are idle."

221
231

Rush "Frung" Basket
Fig. 18. Co. Antrim.

The old customs of tending ("herding") the cattle and tethering or spancelling them also derive from the rundale phase with its lack of field-divisions and fences. "Cattle, sheep, pigs and goats," wrote Arthur Young, "are all in bondage, their forelegs tied together with straw . . . . cocks, hens, turkeys and geese all have their legs in thraldom." Various devices for limiting the freedom of farm animals are still widely used: even the hen with her chickens around her will be seen tethered by the leg to a stone or iron weight. Where animals still run in common under the system of "sums" it is necessary to give them distinguishing marks. Apart from the well-known methods of branding or colouring the sheep's wool it is the custom in parts of Ireland, as in Wales, to ear-mark sheep by cutting or notching the ear with proprietary shapes. In Clare Island the geese are "tokened" by having holes punched in their webbed feet. Incidentally it is worth noticing that, so far as I am aware, the iron-tipped shepherd's crook is unknown in Ireland, a bent ash stick taking its place. "Gatherings" and co-operation are of course a feature of sheep-shearing and dipping. Sheep-pens of dry stone construction are often associated with ancient settlements among the hills: they are of various shapes and would repay study.

[422]
[413]
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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

248 the purest of linen—the story has often been told—and though the scutching mill with its busy waterwheel is an intimate part of the wintry countryside, the flax and tow soon pass into the factories. But we cannot omit a reference to the picturesque oblong stacks "sleighs" or "rays" in which the flax is built after being taken from the dam and dried. And we have referred in another place (Chapter 7), to the "shows" or waste which comes from the scutching mill.

243 But the most important crop throughout Ireland, and as a rule the most difficult to save because it comes late in the season, is oats. September is the harvest month, but in the hills October frequently sees the corn uncarried and even uncut. It is on record that in 1817—in Co. Armagh—"the grain was not reaped in many places until after Christmas." Often the equinoctial gales play havoc with the stooks, and in the days of small scattered rundale plots it was customary for each holder to tie his sheaves with a proprietary knot so that he might claim his own.

[422]

243
412

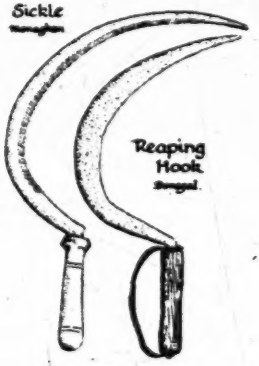

Fig. 53.

Both the toothed hook or sickle (Fig. 53) and the smooth "scythe hook" are used in reaping: the reaping machine and the self-binder have not reached many parts. Sickles are of several varieties, classified in the catalogues as round,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

BALLY AND BOOLEY

These clachans, while some had their speciality such as weaving or thatching, were concerned primarily and almost exclusively with agriculture and attracted none of the elements of the true village, whether church, inn or shops. Itinerant 'tinkers and tailors' paid periodic visits and with the pedlars and beggars brought news of other districts, but the economic and social needs of the hamlet were met by periodic visits to the fairs and by seasonal gatherings of various kinds. Within the group the bonds of kinship were close and strong, and ties of marriage carrying reciprocal responsibilities linked one clachan with another within small neighbourhood units consisting of perhaps half a dozen townlands. With the close kinship bonds went corresponding rivalries with adjacent neighbourhoods which provided social motive force by acting as incentives. These rivalries broke out characteristically into feuds and blood-letting at fairs and gatherings. But in later days, at any rate, internal rivalries and squabbles were more conspicuous and found more opportunities within overgrown kinship groups which had become too complicated to function smoothly. A few illustrations will suffice.

One visitor explained the presence of the back-doors on clustered houses, for which we shall offer other explanations in the following chapter, by the fact that the women needed an escape when too hotly engaged in rows with neighbours.[1] Joint ownership sometimes extended to single animals with strange results. For example: 'three men were concerned in one horse; but the poor brute was rendered useless, as the unfortunate foot of the supernumerary leg remained unshod . . . and accordingly it became quite lame.[2] We are reminded of the difficulties arising from the joint ownership of fruit trees in some Mediterranean countries. It was in Donegal too that I heard of a ram which died of exposure when it was part-shorn by one of its joint owners. In the same district a man wishing to build a wall around one of his fields but unable to get his neighbour to agree, deliberately erected it a yard or two on his own side of the boundary so that the neighbour would still be forced to herd or tether his cow to prevent it trespassing on the

[1] Isaac Weld, *Statistical Survey of Roscommon* (1832), 475.
[2] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 25.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

HARVEST

When the scythe was transferred from the mowing of hay to the cutting of corn during the second half of last century there was much opposition from the reapers, sometimes for the good reason that little fields full of great boulders or the stumps of bog-fir gave no space to swing a scythe, and a single blow on the fast-moving point may ruin the blade. But one suspects that conservatism was rooted in magic. It is said that the rice-growers of Malaya refuse to use a scythe because its slashing motion would frighten away the spirits of the rice. Some such notion may have strengthened the Irishman's condemnation of the scythe. And I find another curious parallel with the Far East. The Malayan reaper hums like an insect while he is cutting the rice, perhaps to soothe the spirits of the living crop. In Ireland there is an old belief that an insect kept in a little box fastened to the handle of hook or scythe will bring luck and give the blade greater cutting power. Both scythe and sickle are personal possessions and their luck is personal: they are loaned with reluctance. When a sickle is borrowed it should not be passed directly from hand to hand but thrown on the ground and then picked up. This belief, which applies to all pointed objects, may be explained by the danger of handling a sharp tool, for bad luck is often related to bad practice.

But before coming to corn harvest the handling of flax should be described. Unpleasant handling it is, even if not quite so onerous (and odorous) as working with hemp or jute. When grown for fibre flax is harvested after the pale blue flowers have fallen but before the seed ripens, and because it is the stalk that is being harvested it is not cut but pulled up by the roots. 'Lint' is a crop of the small family farm, for many hands are required, teams or 'boons' of anything from half a dozen to thirty people gathering from neighbouring farms and working together in a festival spirit which reaches its climax in the evening dance. The tough flax is hard on the hands and the stooping is back-breaking. But the beets (sheaves) are carefully put together, for they have to be spread after retting and the stalks should lie evenly. The three handfuls which compose the beet are laid down at slightly different angles so that they will separate easily. A standard beet is reckoned to be 22 inches in diameter. The bands (ties) are prepared beforehand and consist

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

kelp-making has disappeared, pig rearing has been abandoned, and fishing has become mainly a subsistence pursuit engaged in by only a small number of islanders. Hand in glove with these developments came the enlargement of arable lands and hence an increase in good pasturage, first necessitated by the intrusion of the eelworm and then stimulated by government agricultural supports. Farming became a more time consuming and lucrative occupation, as did the breeding and fattening of cattle and sheep for export, and the keeping of horses and asses expanded to accommodate the increased emphasis on farming. Thus, while the subsistence economy changed but slightly in two generations, the money economy experienced a radical alteration.

At the present time, 59 householders own one or more cattle; 56, one or more sheep; 22, one or more horses; and 58, one or more asses, among whom 8 have 2 asses and 1 a jennet. The government regulates the breeding of both cattle and horses, with the result that only one man is licensed to own a bull and the horses are mares or geldings. Cows are serviced for a 1 pound stud fee in the most inaccessible of fields, where children and tourists cannot observe the breeding of the "beasts." Most of the asses, just as the bulls and stallions, are castrated, but in this case to prevent them from kicking down fences and braying excessively when sexually aroused. Whereas almost all of the horses and asses and a few cattle have been imported from the mainland, the sheep population is Inis Beag sired. For the most part, cattle are grazed on fallowing plots, the few goats on crags at the back of the island, and other livestock on indigenous pasturage.

Cattle owners usually possess a "milch cow," a yearling, and a calf, and cows and bullocks are sold at two years of age. When a milch cow becomes old and "dried up," it either is fattened and sold or, if the price on the mainland is low, butchered and eaten by the householder and his family, usually between Allhallows and Christmas. "Cattle jobbers" visit the island to purchase cows and bullocks, and in 1960 they were paying between 60 and 80 pounds per beast. Excitement prevails on the strand on days when cattle are shipped off. Each struggling animal is pushed out into the sea by a group of men and then pulled to a canoe by a rope attached around its neck; its head is held over the stern transom of the *curach* for the trip to the steamer, where it is hoisted from the water and swung high over the deck and into a hold. Sometimes an islander is forced by circumstances to import a calf, and in 1960 the purchase price of calves at the fair in a nearby port was approximately 20 pounds; a colt cost about 50 pounds and an ass 5.

Probably the most striking difference between cattle rearing on the mainland and in Inis Beag is that island cows are not stabled, but forage and are milked throughout the year in the fields. Between November and March, they are pastured south of the terrace crest on fallowing and the more luxuriant of the indigenous plots, fed hay and rye carried to them from barns and outbuildings, and watered by bucket from neighboring springs which are swollen from winter rains. Men and boys care for their needs during this period, and often spend as many as three hours walking out and back to the pastures twice each day. With the coming of spring, cows are moved to fields on the terraces where women and children can feed and milk them, or men, who are now entering on the busy agricultural and

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

ported on the sea only by thin canvas. Most men are able to make pampooties for themselves, but several islanders specialize in the craft and sell their wares to their fellows and to visitors. Usually cured hides are imported from the mainland, and 40 pairs of pampooties can be fashioned from a whole cowhide. They are cut to shape the foot, have the hair outside, are secured front and back by lacing, and when used daily will last about two months. To be pliable, they must be kept moist, so they are dipped in water when they become dry and hardened; however, because they are worn constantly in wet grass and sand, they seldom lose their softness.

In this chapter, I have considered all of the important means of gaining a livelihood in Inis Beag. Some I have discussed at length, while others I have touched on briefly and will reconsider later; but two thus far not referred to—piloting and recovering objects washed ashore—I would like to take up before ending the chapter. Only one pilot remains in the island, but early in the century men of several families guided vessels through the east sound to ports on the mainland. Then it was customary to place lookouts at the high points of Inis Beag to scan the horizon for masts of approaching ships, and often several canoes would race miles out to sea in order to be first to contact a potential customer. The Terrace villager who still plies the trade seldom contacts likely vessels now, and more often than not his services are refused once he rows to a ship, what with modern charts and navigating instruments. Piloting is still very much alive in the memories of the folk, and one of the popular genres of folklore is the humorous anecdote dealing with real and imagined experiences of pilots. One of these concerns a crew fishing in the east sound which was hailed by the captain of a passing schooner. Although not a pilot, an old member of the crew claimed that he was and climbed aboard, and the captain agreed to hire him after he said that he knew the sound and coastline well. Soon after, the ship struck bottom "with a great bump," and the enraged captain shouted, "I thought you said you knew all the rocks in the sound.", to which the islandman replied in a quiet voice, "I did, and that's one of them." The same old man in another tale earns the job by boxing the compass in Gaelic for the captain; the humor of this story lies in the fact that the captain does not know Irish, and the islandman, who in turn does not know the points of the compass, simply recites terms of reference[2] for kin in a rhythmic manner.

One of the oldest of Inis Beag traditions is the "law of wrack"—the right of islanders to confiscate objects of value which have washed ashore. If a person discovers wrack, he establishes ownership by placing a stone atop it or by carrying it above high water mark, and no one else will claim it. Some islanders wander along the shores at dawn seeking what objects may have washed in during the night, especially timber, and those who habitually engage in this pursuit are known disparagingly as "wrack-boomers"—so poor that they must depend on salvage. During the two world wars, the economy of Inis Beag was bolstered by the immense amount of wreckage which drifted in from torpedoed ships, and the islanders still reminisce about particular visitations of flour, planks, and other

[2] See p. 75 for a definition of terms of reference.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

421
422 valuable commodities. Vessels which have run aground in the past have been
[178] stripped, and in 1960 a portion of the stricken freighter's cargo—namely Scotch
[722] whiskey, yarn, boiler pipes, toilet fixtures, sacks, shoes, and other goods—was
[432] obtained by the folk under the law of wrack. The importance and tenacity of the law were attested by the fact that "salvaging" was continued in the face of opposition from ship owners, insurance representatives, customs officials, visiting police, and even the imprecations of curate and parish priest.